

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6993

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 13132

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, XC, TH, LA, VN, VS, UR

SUBJECT: CALL ON SOVIET AMBASSADOR

SUMMARY: IN THE COURSE OF A CALL ON SOVIET AMBASSADOR BORIS ILYICHEV YESTERDAY, I FOUND HIM PREOCCUPIED WITH THE FUTURE CHINESE ROLE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA BUT PREPARED TO DISCUSS THE LIKELIHOOD THAT SERIOUS DIFFERENCES MAY ARISE BETWEEN PEKING AND HANOI AS EACH STRIVES TO ASSERT ITSELF IN THIS AREA. END SUMMARY.

1. MY CALL ON SOVIET AMBASSADOR ILYICHEV OPENED WITH JOCLAR REMARKS REGARDING THE COMMENTS MADE BY VICE PREMIER TENG HSIAO-PING (PEKING 1220) IN WHICH THE CHINESE PORTRAYED RUSSIA AS BEING A MORE DANGEROUS MONSTER THAN THE UNITED STATES. THE AMBASSADOR NOTED THAT CHINESE STATEMENTS REPEATEDLY ALLUDED TO THE DESIRE OF UNNAMED GREAT POWERS TO ACHIEVE HEGEMONY IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA WHEN, IN FACT, IT WAS THEY WHO WISHED TO ESTABLISH A DOMINANT ROLE. THE CHINESE WERE OBSESSED WITH A NONEXISTENT RUSSIAN THREAT AND WERE EVEN SEEKING TO DISCOURAGE DETENTE IN EUROPE, FEARING THAT THE RUSSIAN ARMIES COULD THEN BE MASSED ON THEIR
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FRONTIERS. ACCORDING TO THE AMBASSADOR, THIS PERSPECTIVE

IS ABSOLUTE NONSENSE AND THE SOVIET UNION IS NOT WAR-LIKE AND HAS NO DESIRE FOR A SPECIAL POWER ROLE IN ASIA. I REPLIED THAT HIS ANALYSIS HAD OMITTED THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF HANOI AND I ASKED HIM WHETHER HE FORESAW A SERIOUS STRUGGLE FOR PRIMACY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA BETWEEN CHINA AND NORTH VIETNAM.

2. AMBASSADOR ILYICHEV SAID THAT THE CHINESE AND VIETNAMESE MIGHT WELL BE PURSUING NATIONALISTIC GOALS CITING THE DEGREE TO WHICH CHINA APPEARS TO BE ESTABLISHING A SPECIAL POSITION IN CAMBODIA. HE VENTURED THE OPINION THAT THE THAI WERE FAR MORE FEARFUL OF THE VIETNAMESE THAN THEY WERE OF THE CHINESE AND THAT THE KHUKRIT VISIT TO PEKING IS AN OBVIOUS ATTEMPT TO BALANCE ONE POWER OFF AGAINST THE OTHER.

3. TURNING TO THE SUBJECT OF VIETNAM, THE AMBAS-

SADOR OPINED THAT DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA WERE HARD TO FORESEE BUT THAT GIVEN THE REAL PROBLEMS WHICH EXISTED IN BOTH VIETNAMS, THE REUNIFICATION OF THE COUNTRY MIGHT TAKE SOME TIME. I POINTED OUT THAT THE SO-CALLED PRG APPEARED TO BE LURKING IN HOTEL ROOMS IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES AND THAT THE ROLE GENERAL TRAN VAN TRA AS MILITARY GOVERNOR IN THE SOUTH SEEMED TO INDICATE THAT THE ROLE AND INFLUENCE OF THE PRG WOULD CONTINUE TO BE VIRTUALLY NON-EXISTENT. THE AMBASSADOR DID NOT DISPUTE THIS THEORY BUT MAINTAINED THAT MANY THINGS ABOUT THE VIETNAMESE SITUATION WERE UNCERTAIN. WE THEN DISCUSSED INCLUSIVELY THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE DRV IS REALLY INTERESTED IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND WHETHER THE MILITANCY OF HANOI WAS NOT SUCH THAT IT WOULD PURSUE AN EXPANSIONIST POLICY. THE AMBASSADOR APPEARED TO AGREE THAT HANOI MIGHT WELL WISH TO DOMINATE ALL OF INDO-CHINA BUT EMPHASIZED THE DIFFICULTY FACED BY ANY REGIME IN POLITICIZING THE RURAL INHABITANTS.

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4. THE AMBASSADOR THEORIZED THAT IN ORDER TO CONTAIN HANOI, PEKING MIGHT DO ITS UTMOST TO DEVELOP A POWER POSITION IN LAOS. I REPLIED THAT THE CHINESE ROAD SYSTEM AND MILITARY PRESENCE IN WESTERN LAOS GAVE PEKING OVERRIDING INFLUENCE IN THAT AREA, BUT IT WAS HARD FOR ME TO SEE HOW INCREASED CHINESE INFLUENCE IN THE PDJ AREA AND IN THE LAO PANHANDLE COULD BE BROUGHT ABOUT, NOTING THE CON-

TINUED PRESENCE OF NORTH VIETNAMESE FORCES IN THOSE AREAS. THE AMBASSADOR COMMENTED THAT THE POLICIES PRESENTLY BEING PURSUED BY THE LAO WOULD DOUBTLESS HAVE AN UNFAVORABLE EFFECT ON THE LAO ECONOMY. I AGREED AND STATED THAT THE LAO, AND ALSO APPARENTLY THE CAMBODIANS, APPEARED TO BE WILLING TO ACCEPT A REDUCED STANDARD OF LIVING IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THEIR POLITICAL AIMS.

5. AMBASADOR ILYICHEV STATED THAT HE HAD BEEN DISTRESSED WHEN HE FIRST ARRIVED IN BANGKOK TO SENSE THE COLD WAR ATMOSPHERE THAT PREVAILED BETWEEN OUR TWO EMBASSIES. HE SAID THAT HE AND AMBASSADOR KINTNER HAD ARRANGED VARIOUS EVENTS IN ORDER TO CREATE A BETTER ATMOSPHERE AND EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT WE COULD CREATE AN ATMOSPHERE OF FRIENDSHIP WHICH WOULD BE APPROPRIATE TO THE RELATIONS WHICH EXISTED BETWEEN OUR COUNTRIES. I REPLIED THAT I ENJOYED MY ASSOCIATION WITH HIS COLLEAGUE IN LAOS AND HAD ORGANIZED VARIOUS GET-TOGETHERS THERE. I AGREED WITH HIM THAT WE SHOULD EXCHANGE VIEWS AND BRING OUR STAFFS TOGETHER UNDER AGREEABLE CONDITIONS.
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